

Culinary Institute of America, Singapore, arms its students with the skills to be chefs and business owners

# Serving up successful graduates

LEANNE CHUA

From a boy who used a microwave to make scrambled eggs for his sister, Mr Terence Chuah, 30, is now the chef-owner of South Union Park, a bistro at Jalan Kembangan.

"It was always my dream to open a restaurant, ever since I was eight when I knew I wanted to be a chef," said the graduate from the Culinary Institute of America (CIA), Singapore.

Mr Chuah is one of a number of CIA bachelor's programme graduates here who have gone on to run their own businesses — helped by their exposure to overseas cultures and relevant kitchen and business skills learnt from their time at CIA.

The world-renowned institute — from which TV food show host Anthony Bourdain graduated — first came to Singapore in 2007 when it partnered Temasek Polytechnic to co-teach the diploma in culinary and catering management programme.

It then partnered the Singapore Institute of Technology in 2010 to offer local polytechnic graduates a two-year programme for the Bachelor of Business Administration in Food Business Management.

It has campuses in the United States and CIA Singapore is its first one in Asia.

Mr Chuah said he would have applied to join the New York campus if CIA had not come to Singapore, but he is glad he didn't have to as it would have been a burden on his parents financially.

The curriculum covers courses including kitchen skills, business and financing principles, and food history.

Chef Eve Felder, managing director of CIA Singapore said: "While they are taking the practical classes, they also are getting a deep dive into business practices and critical thinking skills through multiple courses in the liberal arts."

At the end of their second year, students get a 15-week local or overseas internship, called externships, at any of the 1,600 approved sites offered by CIA.

Mr Chuah completed his externship at Mugaritz in Spain in 2012, when it was rated the world's third best restaurant, while Miss Jerraldine Chen, 26, co-owner of Sin Lee Foods, completed hers in 2013 at three-Michelin-starred restaurant



CIA graduates who have set up their own businesses or work in prestigious restaurants: (front row from left) Miss Elaine Koh, Miss Crystalla Huang, Miss Alicia Soh, Miss Yvette Chua, Miss Jade Chua, Miss Jerraldine Chen, Mr Terence Chuah; (back row from left) Mr Ames Raphael Sim, Mr Sean Kwek, Mr Ivan Lim and Mr Calvin Tan. TNP PHOTO: SALWA NADHIRAH

Eleven Madison Park in New York, the top US restaurant that year. It was voted the world's best restaurant this year.

Said Ms Felder: "We encourage them to work with the best people in the industry before opening their own places."

## PASSION

Having scored under 10 points in her O levels, Miss Chen qualified for top junior colleges but chose instead to follow her passion by pursuing a diploma in culinary and catering management at Temasek Polytechnic and subsequently CIA.

Even though her parents initially didn't support her decision, "they saw that this is my passion and have been financially supportive of my businesses ever since," said Miss Chen, who opened yakitori bar, Mojo, with local actor Shane Pow in February.

The institute has helped students make local connections.

Mr Chuah started his year-old bistro with two school-mates, and two more have joined the outfit's 14 full- and part-time staff.

"I was lucky to find the right people from CIA, who were as

*"It was always my dream to open a restaurant, ever since I was eight when I knew I wanted to become a chef."*

— CIA Singapore graduate Terence Chuah

passionate as I was about food," added Mr Chuah, who says everything is made from scratch, except fries and ice cream, which needs hefty labour and machinery investments.

Fellow alumnus, Mr Ames Raphael Sim, 25, now runs hawker stall Plum & Rice with two fellow CIA graduates at Block 216, Bedok North Street 1.

## HAWKER FARE

Mr Sim took a leap of faith to open the stall last December, selling Japanese-Singapore fusion food sets at \$4 each.

The hawker chef said: "This doesn't make as much money but it is fulfilling, and it'll be a pity if the hawker culture dies out here."

He cited CIA modules such as menu development, costing and psychology as helpful, as they helped him target customers.

Similarly, for Miss Crystalla Huang, 25, her education at CIA helped in her family's business, RedDot Brewhouse.

Miss Huang, who is now Singapore's youngest and first female qualified brewmaster, said her experience in the kitchen has helped her work with Red-

## Eateries run by Culinary Institute of America graduates

### SOUTH UNION PARK

101, Jalan Kembangan  
Opening hours: 5.30pm to 10pm (Tuesday); 11.30am to 10pm (Wednesday to Sunday)

### SIN LEE FOODS

Block 4, Jalan Bukit Ho Swee, #01-164  
Opening hours: 11am to 9pm (Tuesday to Saturday); 9.30am to 6pm (Sunday)

### MOJO

204, Telok Ayer Street  
Opening hours: 11.30am to 12am (Monday to Saturday)

### PLUM & RICE

Block 216, Bedok North Street 1, #01-45  
Opening hours: 8am to 2pm (Tuesday to Sunday)

### HATTER STREET BAKEHOUSE & CAFE

Block 212, Hougang Street 21 #01-333  
Opening hours: 1pm to 10pm

Dot's chefs on improving the dishes, calling herself a "lubricant in the kitchen".

Other graduates from the school include Miss Elaine Koh, who has worked at restaurants Pollen and Odette, and is now a sous chef at acclaimed Michelin star chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten's Dempsey Cookhouse Bar.

Course mate Yvette Chua, 33, owns Hatter Street Bakehouse & Cafe at Kovan, which is now looking to franchise in Malaysia and the Philippines.

Yet another student is Mr Sean Kwek, 27, at American speakeasy, 28 HongKong Street.

He was recently the runner-up in the inaugural Singapore Cocktail Festival's Singapore's Next Top Cocktail competition with his chicken rice inspired-creation, the Lion City Sour.

Ms Felder added that the course provides students with the foundation and confidence to take risks: "They are not afraid of hard work."

Said Mr Chuah: "With what I've learnt, I hope to change the culinary industry in Singapore just a little."

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